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2003

A LIFE OF LEARNING

Peter Brown

Charles Homer Haskins
Lecture for 2003

American Council of Learned Societies

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The Charles Homer Haskins Lecture

Charles Homer Haskins (1870–1937), for whom the ACLS lecture series is named, was the first Chairman of the American Council of Learned Societies, from 1920 to 1926. He began his teaching career at the Johns Hopkins University, where he received the B.A. degree in 1887, and the Ph.D. in 1890. He later taught at the University of Wisconsin and at Harvard, where he was Henry Charles Lea Professor of Medieval History at the time of his retirement in 1931, and Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences from 1908 to 1924. He served as president of the American Historical Association in 1922, and was a founder and the second president of the Medieval Academy of America in 1926.

A great American teacher, Charles Homer Haskins also did much to establish the reputation of American scholarship abroad. His distinction was recognized in honorary degrees from Strasbourg, Padua, Manchester, Paris, Louvain, Caen, Harvard, Wisconsin, and Allegheny College, where in 1883 he had begun his higher education at the age of thirteen.

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Brief Biography

Peter Brown was born in Dublin, Ireland in 1935. In 1956, he received his B.A. from Oxford, and was a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford, 1956–1975. He was Professor of History at Royal Holloway College, University of London from 1975–1978 and then Professor of Classics and History at the University of California, Berkeley from 1978–1986. Since 1986, Professor Brown has been at Princeton University.

Brown's principal concern is the rise of Christianity and the transition from the ancient to the early medieval world. He is the author of *Augustine of Hippo* (Faber, 1967; University of California Press, 1968; 2nd ed. 2000), *The World of Late Antiquity* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1972), *Religion and Society in the Age of Saint Augustine* (Harper & Row, 1972), *The Making of Late Antiquity* (Harvard University Press, 1978), *The Cult of the Saints* (University of Chicago Press, 1981), *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity* (University of California Press, 1982), *The Body and Society* (Columbia University Press, 1988), *Power and Persuasion* (University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), *Authority and the Sacred* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), *The Rise of Western Christendom: 200–1000 AD* (Blackwell Publishers, 1996; 2nd ed. 2003), *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (University Press of New England, 2002). He is currently working on the problems of wealth, poverty, and care of the poor in late antiquity.

Distinguished throughout the world, Professor Brown has received Honorary Degrees at Fribourg, Switzerland (1974), the University of Chicago (1978), Trinity College, Dublin (1990), Wesleyan University (1993), Tulane University (1994), Royal Holloway College, University of London (1996), the University of Pisa (2001), Columbia University (2001) and Harvard University (2002).

Brown is a Fellow of the British Academy, the Royal Historical Society, the American Society of Arts and Sciences, the American

Philosophical Society, the Medieval Academy of America, the Royal Netherlands Academy, and the Academia de Bones Artes, Barcelona. He has received the Arts Council of Great Britain Award (1967), a MacArthur Fellowship (1982), the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award (1989), the Vursell Award (1990), the Heineken Prize, Amsterdam (1994), the Chevalier de l'Ordre des Lettres et des Arts (1996), and an Andrew Mellon Fellowship (2002). Professor Brown also held an ACLS Fellowship in 1980–1981.

Introduction

On the evening of May 9, 2003, I was delighted to welcome Delegates and Presidents of Learned Societies, Administrative Officers, representatives from our college and university associates, ACLS Fellows, and distinguished guests and friends to the Charles Homer Haskins Lecture and to introduce Professor Peter Brown. The active participle in the title of this Lecture Series, "A Life of Learning," is a splendid reminder that the excitement and pleasures of scholarship lie in the process of ongoing investigation and discovery. We all stand to benefit from Peter Brown's commitment to that ideal.

When John William Ward became President of the ACLS in 1982, he sought to commemorate the ACLS tradition of active engagement in scholarship and teaching of the highest quality with an annual lecture. Each year since, we have asked the lecturer:

> . . . to reflect on a lifetime of work as a scholar, on the motives, the chance determinations, the satisfactions (and the dissatisfactions) of the life of learning, to explore through one's own life the larger, institutional life of scholarship. We do not wish the speaker to present the products of one's own scholarly research, but rather to share with other scholars the personal process of a particular lifetime of learning.

Peter Brown's lecture was the twenty-first in this series, which is named for Charles Homer Haskins, the first chairman of ACLS. It is the responsibility of the Executive Committee of the Delegates of ACLS to nominate each year's Haskins Lecturer. After searching deliberations, the delegates fixed firmly and enthusiastically on Professor Brown as a scholar whose many accomplishments over a distinguished career tangibly express the values that we share.

"He is one of very few scholars now alive who have, in effect, invented a field of study," wrote an eminent scholar nominating Peter Brown to be the Haskins Lecturer. That field, the "burgeoning

one of late antique studies," has since become "an expanding galaxy of scholarship in history, religion, literature and much more for which Brown's work provided the initiating Big Bang, and in which he continues to function as a benevolent and generous Providence." Before "Brown's Big Bang," late antiquity, the period between 250 and 800 C.E., was viewed through the lens provided by Edward Gibbon, which saw a half millenium of Decline And Fall plunging the Western World into a darkness unrelieved until the Renaissance. Peter Brown has led the way to a new understanding of a period of enduring social, cultural and religious importance. During this period Roman Law, the basis of much of contemporary jurisprudence, was codified. The Christian Church in both its Latin Catholic and Eastern forms settled on basic structures of organization and belief. The rabbinate took form in Judaism, and the Talmud was codified. Islam was founded. Peter Brown captures the sweep of these tumultuous changes and invites us to experience them. J.E. Lendon called Professor Brown's *Power and Persuasion* "one of those rare books, accessible, important, interesting, and well-written, that students of antiquity should be eager to thrust out from the dark cave of their arcane discipline and into the gaze of a wider scholarly public."

We count ourselves particularly honored that the Haskins Lecture was the second time Professor Brown had given a major address under our sponsorship. Twenty years ago, Professor Brown delivered the ACLS Lectures in the History of Religions, lectures that became *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*. Let me share with you one brief passage from the epilogue of that magnificent work. The following selection demonstrates, I feel, that Peter Brown yields nothing to Gibbon in literary mastery, yet is able to deploy historiographic precision in service of the reader's imaginary and humane understanding. Peter Brown writes:

> To modern persons, whatever their religious beliefs, the Early Christian themes of sexual renunciation, of continence, celibacy, and the virgin life have come to carry with them icy overtones. The very fact that

> modern Europe and America grew out of the Christian World that replaced the Roman Empire in the Middle Ages has ensured that even today, these notions still crowd in upon us, as pale, forbidding presences. Historians must bring to them their due measure of warm, red blood. By studying their precise social and religious context, the scholar can give back to these ideas a little of the human weight that they once carried in their own time. When such an offering is made, the chill shades may speak to us again, and perhaps more gently than we had thought they might, in the strange tongue of a long-lost Christianity.

We were fortunate to have Peter Brown speak to us directly from and about his life of learning on May 9, 2003, and we are pleased to bring his Haskins Lecture to a wider audience now.

—Francis Oakley, Interim President
American Council of Learned Societies

A Life of Learning

by

Peter Brown

I remember the occasion when, in 1988, I had to perform the sad duty of writing the obituary of my friend and mentor, Arnaldo Momigliano. In order to do this, I found that I had to read myself into the intellectual and academic background of the Italy in which the young Momigliano had grown up in the 1920s and 1930s. As a result, I had to study something of the life and thought of the great Neapolitan philosopher, Benedetto Croce, whose Idealist philosophy of history had played a formative role in the historical culture of Italy at that time. You can imagine my surprise when I read, in a short memoir on Croce, written by a contemporary, that, sometime around 1900, the philosopher had challenged a colleague to a duel over an issue of metaphysical philosophy. This was the sort of information which makes one turn the page. I turned the page. No further information was provided. Plainly, the author of the memoir considered that, for his readers, the event was so normal, so much part of the academic life of Naples at the turn of the century, as to require no explanation. The sentence stood there, unashamed, unglossed. It was like coming upon an entry in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*—"This year were dragons seen in the sky." I realized, with a shock, that Momigliano was a man deeply familiar to me. I had come to know and love him in Britain (his adopted homeland) from

the late 1950s onwards. Yet, major representatives of the cultural and academic world into which he had sunk his early roots (Benedetto Croce among them) were as opaque to me as if they had been Merovingians. A salutary sense of otherness descended between myself and them.

A little later, I realized that I, also, could be a Merovingian to other people. I read the draft of an article which declared with confidence that my own work on late antiquity owed much to having taken seminars in England with Mary Douglas and with Michel Foucault in Berkeley. This tidy image of the correct transmission of learning, through high-powered seminars in high-profile centers of learning, was as crass an anachronism as are those charming apocryphal letters of the late antique period in which Saint Paul writes to the philosopher Seneca, or Socrates offers advice to his learned colleague, Plotinus—a Neo-Platonist who lived in Alexandria and Rome a mere seven centuries later. An entire intellectual world, with its distinctive institutional contours, with its particular forms of communication and, one must add, with the implacable horizons which it imposed on the field of vision of those who thought and worked within it, is flattened into a fairy-tale simplicity by such statements.

In fact, my relations with Mary Douglas had consisted, first, in an electrifying late afternoon tea at the Commonwealth Club in London in 1968. This was followed by the rapt reading of her *Purity and Danger* for many evenings in my bath. For, in the world of Oxford in the 1960s, it was in the bath—a place of private relaxation carefully segregated from "real" work—and not in the high-seriousness of the present-day seminar room, that the absorption of other disciplines took place. A little later, I worked my way through the manuscript of *Natural Symbols*, this time in the course of many journeys on the Oxford-Paddington express.

As for Michel Foucault, a lively two-hour argument on the relation between Augustine's notion of concupiscence and John Cassian's notion of the spiritual struggle in the Bear's Lair at

Berkeley, in late 1980, formed the basis of an intellectual friendship, which led to further encounters at the Coffee Shop of University Books on Bancroft and at the French Hotel on Shattuck—intense, but largely unplanned conversations cut short, alas, by his untimely death. No seminars there.

The misapprehension of this well-intentioned student of the historiography of modern times made me realize that it was only necessary for a few decades to slip by, and for myself to have moved a few thousand miles away from the academic world in which I had grown up, to become, even to myself as well as to others, a distant figure, whose intellectual trajectory had taken place according to modes of scholarly activity which are separated from the present by a great strangeness.

It is for this reason that I welcome the opportunity provided by the Haskins Lecture to indulge, this evening, in a frankly autobiographical approach to my own work. For one does not do what the French have come to call *égo histoire* only out of egotism. Rather, scholars need to become, from time to time, historians of themselves in order learn a measure of intellectual humility. A little history puts one firmly back in one's place. It counters the amiable tendency of learned persons to think of themselves as if they were hang-gliders, hovering silently and with Olympian ease above their field, as it has come to spread out beneath them over the years. But real life, one knows, has not been like this. We are not hang-gliders. We are in no way different from the historical figures whom we study in the distant past: we are embodied human beings caught in the unrelenting particularity of space and time.

So let me abandon the elevated but somewhat unreal vantage point of the hang-glider, and come to earth, first, in post-war Britain. We are in a world whose modes of scholarly activity were very different from those now prevailing in modern America. In 1948, I arrived from Ireland at the age of 13 to a Public School (that is, to a private boarding school) at Shrewsbury in England. I was the son of an engineer trained in Dublin, who had recently returned from

Khartoum in the Sudan, having witnessed the very first test-flights of the new jet airplane. I myself had become a keen amateur astronomer, and had re-invented gunpowder to the detriment of my aunt's carpet. I fully intended to enter the Science stream of my new school. My housemaster summoned me to his study. In between puffs of his pipe, he announced with utter certainty: "Brown, you did too well in [the] Entrance [examination] to do Science. You shall do . . . Greek." And Greek I did, if only for one year, before taking the Junior Certificate and then lapsing from the high calling of a classical scholar in the English Public School tradition into the study of mere History.

But I already sensed within that one year, that, for an Irish boy from a Protestant family, to "do Greek" was not quite the same thing as to "do Classics" for my English school-mates. For those who taught them, the Classics were the way back to the Dream Time of European civilization. To learn Greek was to enter a world of perfect forms (in language, art and culture) untarnished by the passing of mere time. Above all, it was the way back from a present still heavy with the legacy of traditional Christianity into an age thought to be unclouded by the superstitions, the intolerance and the inhibitions of later, sadder centuries.

For me, it was no such thing. To "do Greek" was to return to the New Testament and, through the New Testament, to the origins of Christianity itself, set against the spreading landmass of the Ancient Near East. Classical Athens and "the Glory that was Greece" were strangely peripheral to the world of the Gospels and of the *Acts of the Apostles* which the learning of Greek opened up to me at that time. An ancient world in which neither Judaism nor Christianity had any place could not be anything for me other than a bright but insubstantial dream. Only the ancient world in its fateful last centuries could explain the world in which I myself lived—a Protestant in an Ireland dominated by a Roman Catholicism which claimed direct continuity with the post-Roman, medieval past, and a boy who had been a child in Khartoum (where, so my parents told

me, I had been blessed by none other than the Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia) and who looked always, throughout the war years and beyond, to a Middle East, where his father worked and where the ancient monuments of Egypt and the ruined cities of Hellenistic and Roman times stood in the midst of what are now Muslim societies. If I was to "do Greek," it was to study an ancient world with a rich future before it—and the key to that future was to be found in the period which I later came to know as Late Antiquity.

Almost 10 years later, in 1956, I was summoned by yet another authority figure. This time it was the Regius Professor of History, Vivian Galbraith, a doyen of the medieval profession. He was to interview me on my intended line of research for a dissertation in medieval history. He was bent over the fire in his rooms in Oriel, rattling the grate with a poker. Without turning to me, he asked abruptly: "Well, Brown, have you got a bishop? Everyone, you know, should have a bishop."

Indeed, I had a bishop, a fifteenth-century bishop. Better still, I had an English bishop; and best of all, I had a bishop (indeed a whole choice of bishops, among them Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury, Bishop Beaufort and Cardinal Morton) each with a complete Register through which I would study the details of episcopal administration and of the relations of Church and State in the later middle ages. For to study some aspect of the administrative and political history of late medieval England through direct access to hitherto unread archives was accepted, in the Oxford of that time, as the ticket to academic adulthood.

I soon dropped my bishop. The supreme good fortune of a Junior Fellowship at All Souls College (the equivalent of a Post-doctoral Fellowship, but held for a full seven years) gave me the opportunity to begin to learn the skills of an ancient historian. I began to "do Greek" again. Yet, within a few years, I had re-emerged with a bishop. But this particular bishop had lived over a thousand years earlier and over a thousand miles to the south of where bishops were normally

to be found in the Medieval History School of Oxford—it was Augustine of Hippo.

In this choice, I think, I allowed a specific, Irish Protestant background to determine my choice of subject. Deeply drawn though I was to the study of the middle ages, and in many ways entranced by the sheer beauty of the late medieval buildings of Oxford, and by the exquisite medieval country churches in its vicinity, I was not swayed by a specifically English, Anglican nostalgia for the medieval past. As far as I was concerned, what had really mattered in the history of Christianity had happened in the centuries which preceded the middle ages—in the Early Church; and much of it had happened a long way from England—in the Middle East (the Ancient Near East of the Bible) and, subsequently, along the shores of the classical Mediterranean. Yet in choosing to study Augustine of Hippo, I remained loyal to an important aspect of my undergraduate training as a medievalist. For what concerned me most, at that time, was how the life of Augustine, and especially the manner in which he had spent the last 35 years of his life (from the age of 41 to 76) as a Catholic bishop in North Africa, threw light on the process by which the Christian Church rose to power in Roman society. In this way, the activities of Augustine and his contemporaries could be seen to have laid the foundations for the future dominance of the Catholic Church in medieval western Europe. In a slow but continuous process, which ran from the days of the fall of Rome to the Reformation, Professor Galbraith's late medieval bishops had all of them come from *my* bishop.

It is important to make this clear. Despite the towering spiritual stature of its hero, I did not conceive of my biography of Augustine as a contribution only to the religious history of late antiquity. Far from it. *Religion and Society in the Age of Augustine* (the title of the first collection of my articles) was somewhat of a *cri de guerre* for me: it was the slogan for an entire academic enterprise. Religion without Society interested me not in the least.

This was not altogether surprising. To be a member of the Protestant minority of southern Ireland was to grow up in a world where religion penetrated every aspect of the social life of one's own community quite as fully as it penetrated the life of the Catholic majority. Religion and identity went hand in hand. I remember that, at the age of six, I was, predictably, greatly interested in cowboys. But one thing held me back from full identification with these new heroes. Were cowboys Catholics or were they Protestants?

Up to this day, the study of religious experience divorced from a precise social context has always struck me as a singularly weightless exercise. A history of the rise of Christianity that is not rooted in a precise and up-to-date history of the social, economic and cultural circumstances of the later empire and the early middle ages is, quite simply, not a history.

Easier said than done. But, ever since the writing of *Augustine of Hippo*, I have tried as best I can to do it. What is important, for this occasion, is to point out that this has been a strenuous and often messy business. Nothing can be more misleading than to treat the evolution of a scholar's work as if it had followed a predetermined trajectory, pursued with preternatural ease, without doubt, without false starts, and, above all, without a continued aching sense of ignorance and of the need for the help of others.

It is also an enterprise which depends, more intimately perhaps than we are prepared at times to admit, on the distinctive tone and resources of the academic environments in which we find ourselves. As an emigrant to the United States, I have passed through many of these.

The first was the Lower Reading Room of the Bodleian Library in Oxford. Looking back, there is something quite as strange about that Reading Room, in the 1950s and 1960s, as distant to modern scholars and as much in need of patient reconstruction as are the quiet study-circles of a late antique philosopher or the noisy, petulant world of a late Roman *grammaticus* to which I more often pay attention.

It was a world of books, each deeply rooted in the landscape of a single library. They were available in one place only, for rapt readers, who, themselves, had taken on something of the quality of natural features. They were visible year after year at their desks. Over the years, from 1953 to 1978, I passed from status to status. In these years, my mind changed often. But in the Lower Reading Room of Bodley nothing seemed to change. Opposite me, for instance, there always sat a known authority on the relation between Augustine's Scriptural readings and the liturgy of Hippo. He was not a member of the university. He was a clergyman who came up regularly from his vicarage in the countryside of Oxfordshire. I observed that he wore bedroom slippers. Frequently, the slippers appeared to win out over the books, and he would fall asleep. A prim young man at that time, I wondered if I could really trust the views of so somnolent a person on the Donatist schism. But the reverend gentleman stood for a wider world of learning, open to more professions and capable of nourishing many more forms of scholarly endeavor than that which I now expect to find, among my colleagues, in a seminar room. It was for persons such as him—for persons of learning and of general culture, who were not necessarily academics—as well as for my students and colleagues at Oxford, that I wrote my *Augustine of Hippo*, and went out of my way to ensure that it would be published in England by Faber's of London and not by a University Press.

Figures such as these communicated the uncanny stillness of a shared life of learning. The books which we read together at those desks (and not the busy world of the seminar and the graduate program) were our true interlocutors. They were the eternal hills against which each one of us defined our own intellectual endeavor, with the fierce, if often barely articulate, urge of the young to make new sense of the old stories contained in so many of those books. It was my first experience of the salutary strangeness of a distinctive academic environment.

From the vantage point of a quarter of a century of residence in the United States, it is easy for me to delineate (maybe, even, slightly

to romanticize) the strangeness of the Bodleian Library of the 1960s and 1970s. It is harder to catch the exact flavor of the strangeness of Berkeley in 1978, seen through the eyes of a recent arrival from the British Isles. What struck me instantly and most forcibly was the fact that, at Berkeley, the university appeared, at first sight, to have engulfed all culture. In England, my intellectual life had been self-consciously "polyfocal." It was agreed that Oxford was where the dull dons did their thing: they transmitted "godly learning," absorbed in the Bodleian Library, largely in the manner which I have described. But it was in the metropolitan culture of London that the answers to the secrets of human nature were to be found—among psychoanalysts in Maida Vale and Hampstead, in vibrant centers of anthropology and ethnographic study grouped around institutes fostered by the generous horizons of a former Empire, in European traditions of cultural history associated with the Warburg Institute in Bloomsbury. One's relations with the theoretical frameworks on which one drew to make sense of the social and religious phenomena of late antiquity were appropriately compartmentalized. One read one's late antique texts "in Bodley." But one read Mary Douglas in the bath, or on the train "up" to London (or was it "down"? I forget: it was certainly a direction still charged, in 1970, with considerable cultural and social meaning).

In Berkeley, this amiable compartmentalization was not to be found. Apparently, in seminars all over the campus, Mary Douglas was being read, at all hours of the day, in all manner of departments and by students at all levels. One was not allowed to be out of date in such matters. The first occasion on which I met colleagues in my field was a seminar in which they discussed the draft of my *Cult of the Saints*. They chided me courteously, but in no uncertain terms, for having failed to mention the word "liminal." Of course, they were right. I went away and dutifully read my Victor Turner.

But I could not help noticing the very different terms on which theoretical insights were to be absorbed in this new environment. This was not a "polyfocal" world. Good things from "out there"

must not remain at a slight distance, to tweak the consciences and to open the minds even of Oxford dons. They must come in as quickly as possible, and find expression within the structures of the university. I soon noticed that the word "interdisciplinary" brought a smile to the lips of deans and was calculated to move the hearts of funding bodies. I also noticed that, in the evaluation of competing candidates or proposals for research, the word "under-theorized" fell from the lips of opponents with decisive effect. Plainly, for the aspiring young, as for their teachers, the road to adulthood lay, not through the choice of a bishop, but through the choice of a "theory."

This was a vivid first impression. But, in many ways, it affected only the surface of my life. What moved me more deeply, in the long run, was what I was not prepared for: a new high seriousness which grew out of the daily rhythms of my teaching. It is difficult to communicate to an American audience the extent to which the elective course system which we take so much for granted in our universities can widen the heart of those who come to it from other systems of instruction. To teach in Oxford or London in the 1970s was to spend large tracts of time each week grooming relatively sophisticated late adolescents so that they should shine in a final examination in fields that were always far wider than one's own specialty and whose principal themes had been laid down by long academic convention. The collective common sense of English academe at its most stuffy rested heavy on the syllabus of such final examinations. Not surprisingly, this rigid system had fostered a very particular brand of "tutorial wisdom." This consisted of the effort to find something to say that was new and unexpected about conventional topics where the usual answers were of crushing predictability. It was a system that bred, in keen young teachers and in bright students alike, a horror of the obvious. For the principal effort of the teacher, and then of the examinee, was to bring a little "class," a little fire and strangeness into what everyone was supposed, in any case, to know already, if in a more pedestrian and commonplace manner.

By making the teacher responsible largely for his or her own specialty, and by insisting that this specialty should be taught at every level—from top graduate students to total novices—the elective course system gives the long-despised obvious the chance to catch up with the teacher. The moment I arrived at Berkeley, I found myself being asked blunt questions about themes which, ever since the days of Edward Gibbon, had characterized the period associated with the end of the ancient world and the birth of the middle ages. These were the conventional questions which the wise tutors of Oxford had tended to take for granted or to dismiss from their minds as terminally "uncool." Why did paganism come to an end? What caused the expansion of the Christian Church? Was the rise of Christianity good for Sex?

There is nothing more refreshing to the mind, after a period of somewhat frenetic sophistication, than the return of old questions in a new environment. Berkeley was just the place for this. Under a sky usually as blue as a fresco of the Italian *Trecento* and in the shadow of great Beaux Arts buildings, which made Berkeley—the proud "Athens of the West"—look reassuringly more like the late classical, Roman Athens of the emperor Hadrian and of Herodes Atticus (my sort of people) than the Athens of Pericles, I found myself drawn to themes and to styles of presentation to which I had not expected myself to turn. I became absorbed by the search for sanctity among the men and women of late antiquity. What images of the human person were assumed in this high search? What resources of the human soul and body were thought to have been mobilized in the ascetic regime associated with "my" holy men? What was the effect of ascetic renunciation on the social and physical life conventionally associated with "normal" persons? What, bluntly, was the effect of radical Christian notions of holiness on sexuality and marriage? These basic questions were being asked with vigor at a time when "sexual politics" were very much in the air all over America. It was to answer such questions that I settled down to write *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity.*

The Body and Society was, in many ways, a new venture for me. In England, the principal thrust of my work had been to mobilize the insights of a largely British tradition of social anthropology so as to explain how the "holy" had functioned in late antique society. What had held my attention, at that time, were precisely those figures and practices which cried out for explanation to modern readers, who tended to regard them as more than a little odd: wild Syrian holy men, worshippers at miracle-working shrines, forms of early medieval ordeal by battle or by hot iron. The odder the phenomenon, the more I was attracted to it. For through it, I hoped to glimpse the long, slow cunning of the pre-modern, late antique communities who plainly found such figures and such practices not only awe-inspiring but also useful. I wished to give back even to the most flamboyant figures, to those most repugnant to a modern observer, a little of their workaday human face.

But I still saw them, as it were, from the outside. What I had not done, at that time, was ask myself what it was like for men and women to work upon themselves in such a way as to achieve such forms of dramatic sanctity; or what it meant to feel drawn to such sanctity by those who sought out holy men and holy women not only because they were "useful," but because they were admirable and, even, imitable figures. Furthermore, I was aware that ascetic Christianity was not the only religious movement in late antiquity. In explaining the social role of extreme cases of Christian sanctity (such as the day-to-day role of Symeon the Stylite, perched on his 60-foot column among the villages of northern Syria), I had not yet found a way of explaining forms of religious authority linked to less dramatically world-challenging forms of holiness. I had followed the literature on the role of the rabbi in late antique Judaism, of the philosopher in pagan circles, of the Sufi sage and of the *`alim* in medieval and even in modern Islam. But I had as yet no words with which to speak of these persons. Plainly, they could not be caught in the same net of explanation as I had thrown over the more flamboyant saints of the Christian world.

Recent travel in Islamic countries—in Iran, Afghanistan and Egypt, between 1975 and 1978—had left me puzzled. I had found noisy healing shrines all right: but I had also been challenged by more ordinary things. I was intrigued by the distinctive forms taken by the communication of learning among the Muslim *'ulema'*, by the tenacity of moral codes designed to embrace entire communities of married persons and by the very real poise and decorum which is so striking a feature of so many Muslims in their relationships among themselves and to outsiders. Other figures from late antiquity than the dramatic ascetic saints on which I had concentrated—the quiet pagan sages, the many well-groomed products of traditional late classical *paideia*, the Jewish rabbis: married persons, at home in their social environment—now came to mind as analogues, in my own period, for many of the phenomena which I had observed in Islamic countries and had discussed with leading Islamicists.

At the same time, I read Pierre Hadot's inspiring essay, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, which appeared in 1981. It is important to recapture something of the impact upon me of this essay of 45 pages. I learned from it how to sense the existential weight of moral seriousness with which the texts of ancient philosophy (now lined up beside me in the Classics Seminar Room of Dow Library, which looked out to the Golden Gate Bridge, or in the library of the Graduate Theological Union, beneath the swaying palms of "Holy Hill") had been read by their original authors and their charges. Hadot's insistence on philosophy as a way of life in classical antiquity, and his exegesis of classical philosophical texts as designed to bring about a slow but sure transformation of the self, gave a human face and a human earnestness, at last, to what had tended previously to strike me as no more than somewhat ethereal moral Uplift. Hadot changed all that for me. A non-Christian quest for sanctity, majestically serious and challengingly distinctive in its assumptions about the nature of the human person, came into view. Without Hadot, I would not have turned with as much interest as I did to the work of his colleague at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault. In his *Care of the Self*, Foucault made plain his debt to

Hadot, just as Hadot himself, in a series of luminous articles, has delineated his distance from Foucault's own distinctive preoccupations and challenging, if idiosyncratic, reading of the ancient texts. Despite my gratitude for the work of Foucault and my appreciation of his friendship, in my mind Hadot's *Exercices spirituels* (which, to our shame as an academic culture, was not made available in English translation until 1995) has always come first.

Thus, it was the challenge of other forms of holiness—associated in my own recent experience of the Islamic world—combined with the urgent plea of Pierre Hadot to take seriously the moral earnestness of the pagan predecessors and contemporaries of the Christian holy men that led me to the writing of *Body and Society*.

In many ways, *Body and Society* was an agreeably old fashioned book. It moved slowly from Christian author to Christian author, attempting to listen seriously to each one of them in turn. It concentrated on the manner in which men and women in early Christianity experienced their own bodies. It attempted to do justice to the social and moral context which enabled the writers of the time to throw up, with such vigor, so many daring and so many outrageously non-modern opinions on sexuality and marriage.

Above all, it was a book in which my previous zest for explanation was held in suspense. I no longer wished to render the persons whom the reader would encounter in this book totally transparent to understanding, as I had attempted to do, with gusto, when faced by even stranger figures at an earlier stage of my work, when still in England. I wanted to make sure that the ancient authors spoke to us quietly, and with their own voices. I wanted to recover, for the modern reader, something of the weight of the life-choices which they had made, of the solidity of the ideals which they had followed, and the reserves of warmth and comfort from God and their companions on which they hoped to draw, as they trod what was often a long, hard road.

Altogether, it was, I dare say, a somewhat "under-theorized" book. It was not the book which many conventional images of

Berkeley (including my own, in my first contact with it) would have led one to expect to emerge from the University of California. Yet, in its debt to the resources of the theological libraries of Holy Hill, to the deliciously old-fashioned, somewhat "Beaux Arts" quality of the holdings of its Classics Seminar Room, and, above all, to the urgency for straight answers to conventional questions evinced by its students, *Body and Society* (though finally completed at Princeton) was very much a "Berkeley Book."

To come to the East Coast from Berkeley in 1983 was to arrive, immediately, in more bracing air. There was a sectarian earnestness about the methodological debates of the time which I had not noticed in Berkeley. Looking back, I put this down to a measure of willful innocence on my part. For I was still fresh from a British system where scholars had functioned on an image of the world characterized by an element of studied naivety. In every university, so we chose to believe, there were two sorts of persons: there were scholars and there were politicians. We knew who the politicians were. We knew what they did. Sometimes they helped us. More often they thwarted our high purposes. We usually regarded their maneuvers, in Common Room, Senate House and Convocation, as afflictions, sent, from time to time, to try the patience of the saints. What I now witnessed, with a certain awed fascination, was something very different: scholars playing politics with scholarship itself. I am told by historians of the period that I was, at that time, enjoying the privilege of witnessing the last phases of the Culture Wars. Frankly, I did not like what I saw. If insistence on commitment to "theory" in historical studies led to this, then I had no wish to follow it down this particular road.

I think that you will have realized by now that I harbor a particular affection for the libraries of the various universities with which I have been associated. The contents, even the layout, of a good library can do more to massage the mind, in the long run, than any number of exemplary seminars or stimulating colleagues. And, in the libraries of Princeton, I found God's plenty. In the library of the Institute of Advanced Studies, I found an unsurpassed and actively maintained

collection of material on every aspect of the ancient world—archaeological, epigraphic and papyrological, as well as textual. The same could be said of Firestone and of the archaeological sections of Marquand Library. While Firestone, together with the Speer Library of Princeton Theological Seminary, embraced the entire Patristic, early medieval and medieval periods. Long before my colleague, Tony Grafton, initiated me into *The Sad History of the Footnote*, I was in the habit of referring to Princeton as "the Footnote Capital of the Western World." Knowing how much I love a good footnote, believe me that this was, for me, a choice term of endearment.

For there are certain things that can best be done through well-stocked footnotes. Erudition, diverse and concrete, is the only way into crucial areas of the study of late antiquity. For it was at Princeton that I came to feel free to move, once again, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, towards areas of research that resonated more fully with the medievalist manqué in me. I wished, after years of studying elevated images of the human person, to find again some outlet for my sense of the concrete. This was what the erudition of superb historical and archaeological libraries did for me, and especially when my reading was fleshed out and further stimulated, as it was in these years, by renewed bouts of travel to the late antique landscapes of the Middle East (to Turkey, Syria, Jordan and Israel).

Problems of the exercise of power within the imperial structures of the later Roman empire, for instance, took on a new urgency for me—and not least when the advent of *Perestroika* in the Soviet Union after 1986, and the immediately preceding phenomenon of the Russian Dissidents, revealed to western observers something of the complexity of the role of moral authority in the politics of a faltering autocratic state.

The work which I had already done (under the inspiration of Pierre Hadot) on the role of self-grooming associated with the *paideia* of the governing classes in the eastern empire of the fourth and fifth centuries, and on the unusual exemplary status still enjoyed by pagan philosophers in a nominally Christian world, now flowed

naturally into my study of the wider world of power and its control. I was struck by the manner in which the decorum associated with *paideia* acted as a form of restraint on violence and on the exercise of governmental power among the educated elites of the late antique Mediterranean. As I wrote *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity*, in the early 1990s, I lingered with delight over themes that were relevant to the re-definition of the notion of the state itself in contemporary eastern Europe and the Middle East. At the same time, such themes were the stuff of eminently satisfying footnotes—the details of urban politics in Antioch in the age of Libanius, the cultural and political messages conveyed in inscriptions set up in honor of governors in what are now late classical ghost towns in the hinterland of Turkey, Greece and Syria, the layout of bishops' palaces and the repair of hippodromes, and, last but not least, the theological views of a pet parrot, set to squawk contentious verses of Monophysite tendency in the courtyard of the Great Church of Antioch. I felt that my feet were, once again, touching solid ground.

For, once again, I had found my way back to bishops. And they were different from how they had been when I had visited them last—now some 30 years before—in my study of Augustine of Hippo. For little did I dream, when I completed *Augustine of Hippo* in 1967 that, from 1981 onwards, the careful "trawling" of the libraries of Europe (now greatly aided by the resources of the computer) would reveal 27 hitherto unknown letters from Augustine's old age and 22 long sermons from his early years as a bishop. I have been led by this new evidence to revise my original impression of the role of the Catholic bishop in North Africa. For the new *Letters* and *Sermons* reveal a messier world, where Augustine's authority was more fragile than I had thought. They frequently show Augustine thwarted by circumstances—shouted down by noisy congregations, cheated by rogue colleagues, helpless in the face of an oppressive and resolutely profane bureaucracy. It appears as if the rise to power of the Christian Church in Roman society had been a slower and more hesitant process than I had thought in 1967. To plot the changes in the Latin Church by which western Christendom

changed over time from the still insecure bishops of the age of Augustine to the world of Professor Galbraith's self-confident late medieval Princes of the Church has become that much more challenging. In late antiquity at least, episcopal power was not a foregone conclusion.

And this is what, in recent years, I have tried to do—to approach once again, in the light of much new evidence, the problem of the social role of the Christian Church. My most recent book, *Poverty and Leadership*, looks at the manner in which the facilities offered by the bishop and clergy for the care of the poor helped to bring about a change in the social imagination of late antique society. For to move from a classical world which saw itself as divided, city by city, between citizens and non-citizens, to a society which saw itself as universally polarized, in town and country alike, between rich and poor, is to follow a silent mutation in the "body image" of an entire society. It is a mutation as drastic in its own way as is the mutation of the "body image" of the individual which accompanied the rise of Christian asceticism at the same time and in the same regions.

Where does all this now leave me? It has left me, perhaps, with an even greater zest for footnotes and with a yet sharper skepticism for mere texts. The application of literary theory to the textual evidence of late antiquity has left us with a sober respect for the power of texts in and by themselves to iron out the tensions and anomalies of real life. If each age gets the historical methodology that it deserves, then the Christian writers of late antiquity, skilled rhetors that they were and impenitent producers of powerful and self-serving "representations" of the world around them, have got what they richly deserved: a stringent dose of post-modern "hermeneutical suspicion."

It is for this reason that I have been drawn, over the years, to the problem of Christianization in Europe and the Middle East in the late antique and early medieval periods. A study of the spread of Christianity in western Europe, in the period between 200 and 1000 A.D., especially in the recent Second Edition of *The Rise of Western*

Christendom, has involved me in the comparison of societies as far apart as Ireland, Iceland, Armenia and Central Asia. For each of these regions produced, at this time, its own "representation" of the process of Christianization. A comparative study of these representations tells us much about the cultural resources of local forms of Christianity. It also challenges us always to look elsewhere—if possible, to archaeological data, but, also, to the great, untidy "excavation site" of the texts themselves. We still must sift these texts, again and again, for hitherto unconsidered scraps of evidence, for hints of unresolved anomalies and of alternative voices lurking on the very margins of the evidence.

Frankly, I find this great fun to do. And it is fun not least because it tends to heighten one's respect for the more subdued, for the more slow-moving and for the less verbalized (because the less easily verbalizable) phenomena of a world in transition. I have liked what I have found. I have developed a taste for smaller figures, glimpsed in great numbers, against a late antique landscape of greater religious and cultural complexity than we had once supposed.

And so it is that, somewhat to my surprise, having begun with the study of a towering bishop, such as Augustine of Hippo, and moved on from there to study a startling gallery of early Byzantine holy men and women, I have found myself, for the moment at least, happy to find myself among the little people, often glimpsed at the very edge of the field of vision of triumphalist Christian texts. Such people did not know, for sure, that late antiquity was happening to them. Although, by the end of the period, most would have thought of themselves as Christians, they did not draw the boundaries between themselves and their pagan past with the neatness that became possible in future ages. They were content to get along as best they could in a still ambiguous present. In the pungent words of the modern Greek poet, Kostís Palamas (appropriately cited by an archaeologist commenting on the clutter of magical tablets marked by pagan, Jewish and Christian symbols found in the houses of Annemurium, an early Byzantine site on the southern coast of Turkey):

Neither Christians quite nor quite idolaters,
Using our crosses and our images,
We are trying to build the new life
Whose name is not yet known.

To develop the skills necessary to treat with intelligence and respect persons, little as well as great, caught, in this way, on the edge of an unknown future, remains the *ars artium* of any historian of late antiquity. I hope that I have delineated, inevitably briefly but with sincere gratitude, the many environments which have nourished me and which have taken me, through so many unforeseen ways, to consider layer after layer of a world in transition. My hope is that other scholars, many of them very different from myself in background and in intellectual trajectory, will continue to linger as I have done, now for almost half a century, on the world of late antiquity. On looking back on my own life of learning, I still think that the best motto for us all is to be found at the foot of the stairs that led up from the old entrance to the Bodleian Library. Above a list of donors is a strange verse, taken from the *Book of Daniel*:

Plurimi pertransibunt et multiplex erit scientia
(*Daniel* 12:4)

Many shall go to and fro and ever more abundant shall be their knowledge.

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